

of parapsychology, some may see little value in monitoring publications and research in these countries, perhaps because they doubt that the material produced by such researchers would be of sufficient quality to make an important contribution to the field (Alvarado, 1989a).

This lack of attention to information about Ibero-American parapsychology presents a serious problem for English-speaking parapsychologists, who often receive invitations to attend parapsychological conferences in some of these countries where there are groups whose commitment to academic parapsychology is doubtful and whose only purpose in extending their invitations is to legitimize local efforts, which are sometimes a dubious mix of parapsychology, spiritism, ufology, and so on. A better knowledge of parapsychology in these communities could facilitate evaluation of the goals of specific groups who identify themselves as parapsychologists. David Hess (1990) has pointed out the following concerning Brazilian parapsychology:

[Since] anything "international" or "first world" in Brazil means additional status, the participation of PA parapsychologists at Brazilian conferences that represent one group could mean legitimating either Catholic or Spiritist parapsychology at the expense of the other group. (p. 110)

Although it is true that such groups exist, it is important to mention that there are also serious groups and researchers who for many years have carried out important work—work that deserves recognition even though the language barrier has hindered its reception in the international parapsychological arena. Efforts to bridge this lack of attention and to increase cooperation with Ibero-American researchers will not only help those in the English-speaking countries to better understand cultural differences and national styles in research practice, but also help the researchers in the Ibero-American world to improve the quality of their work. Therefore, I have selected the following countries for a general survey of the research that has been conducted in parts of Ibero-America: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Spain.

### *Spain*

There has never been a serious attempt to organize the history of psychical research in Spain, and information is scarce on early attempts to study psychic phenomena seriously. It was not until the 1920s that the Sociedad Española de Estudios Metapsíquicos was

created under the presidency of the Count of Gimeno, member of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Medicine. The Society published a journal called *Revista de Estudios Metapsíquicos* (Fernández Briones, 1981b). The research orientation of the Society was to study spontaneous cases and psychics, such as the famous Joaquín Argamasilla (expert in dermo-optical perception) whose abilities Houdini attempted to expose (Houdini, 1924).

Most of the work of this society, however, was lost after the Spanish Civil War during a period of isolation in which only a few researchers kept the torch burning. Familiar names from this period are Sánchez Herrero, the Marquis of Santa Clara, J. Palmés, and M. Otero y Acevedo, researchers whose independent efforts contributed to a new generation of investigators such as Ramos Perera Molina, Francisco Gavilán Fontanet, and Luis Fernández Briones. This latter group, at the beginning of the 1970s, founded the first well-organized society to investigate psychic phenomena in Spain. It was called the Sociedad Española de Parapsicología (Fernández Briones, 1981b). From its inception, this Society, under the direction of Ramos Perera Molina, had as its main goal to promote the scientific study of parapsychology. To achieve this goal, the Society combined the efforts of experts in experimental design, illusionism, psychology, medicine, and other fields of science and in 1976 established a research center (De Vicente, 1983).

To carry out its research projects, the Society has been divided into several research committees that specialize in different areas embracing field studies as well as experimental projects. Among these committees are those concerned with the development of theoretical models to enhance ESP, Kirlian photography, experimental research, OBEs, and the medical aspects of psi. More recently, a new committee was established<sup>2</sup> to investigate anomalous phenomena along the lines of the Society for Scientific Exploration.

Members of the Society have carried out original research projects in experimental parapsychology as well as research on spontaneous cases. They have also critically evaluated miracle claims made by the Catholic church in Spain, such as the liquefaction of the blood of Saint Pantaleón (Jordán Peña, 1983).

One of the most interesting investigations has been conducted by members of the research committee headed by Francisco Gavilán Fontanet (1976). In this study, the committee investigated identical

<sup>2</sup> The goal of the committee is to investigate UFOs, cryptozoology, religious ap-  
 anomalous phenomena scientifically.

twin girls presumed to have been born with psi abilities. The case had received extensive coverage by the media in Spain. According to the reports of the case, one of the twin girls had suffered a burn on her hand while ironing. Her sister, separated from her at the time the burning occurred (16 kms away), developed a similar burn on the same hand. The Society sent a team of researchers to carry out a careful investigation of the case. They conducted a series of experiments to determine the possible existence of psi communication between the sisters. One of the experiments consisted of separating the two girls into two different buildings and stimulating one of them (the sender) with different sensorial inputs (like perfume) while observing physiological reactions, such as pupillary and palatal reflexes, in the other twin (the receiver). Psychological profiles of the twins were also obtained from projective tests. The sessions with the two girls were simultaneously filmed to document the stimuli as well as the perceptual pattern of the reactions. The results showed simultaneous reactions of the twins' reaction time and visual and olfactory responses.

In 1978 the members of the Society conducted another important study, an international survey of the motivational factors of parapsychological researchers. Headed by Gavilán Fontanet (1978), the main objective of the study was to find out what motivates parapsychologists to investigate psychic phenomena.

They surveyed 201 parapsychologists from 18 countries around the world. Among the parapsychologists were J. B. Rhine, S. Krippner, and C. Tart. Three hundred questionnaires, each having 23 questions, were prepared in five different languages<sup>3</sup> and were mailed to researchers throughout the world. Among the interesting findings were that 61% of the respondents were psychologists, psychiatrists, and medical doctors, 45% considered themselves agnostics, 24% got involved in parapsychology while looking for a philosophical answer to the question of the nature of man, 31% got involved for scientific reasons, 51% believed in a transcendent intelligence, 50% believed in some type of survival after death (of these 10% believed in reincarnation), and 71% rejected astrology.

Another research objective of the Society was the search for a theoretical model to enhance psi abilities. For this purpose the Society created the Committee for the Development of ESP<sup>4</sup> headed by Luis Fernández Briones. The Committee's purpose was to outline

a methodological model for the practical development of ESP. Once the model and the techniques were developed, the Society hoped it would be possible to train subjects to obtain positive results over an extended period of time (Fernández Briones, 1976), thus confronting the replicability problem that characterizes most psi research. Although the Committee has not been successful as yet, the results obtained so far are encouraging. Fernández Briones summarized the findings in his book entitled *Desarrollo de la Percepción Extrasensorial* [The Development of Extrasensory Perception] (1983). Among the techniques used by the Committee to attain this goal are the inducement of altered states of consciousness and the application of learning theory principles to ESP performance, such as those proposed by Charles Tart (1966). Although the results have only been suggestive, Fernández Briones was hopeful enough to emphasize the need for more research to test the proposed models sufficiently.

Other research conducted by members of the Society includes investigations of poltergeist cases (Jordán Peña, 1980)<sup>5</sup>; conceptual papers related to the ability of some fish, such as the electric eel and the sturgeon of the Nile, to obtain information about their surroundings through electrical communication, which the authors speculated might be a primitive language of telepathy (Bardasano Rubio & Arano Bermejo, 1980a); examination of the migration of carrier pigeons and other animals to develop a model for ESP (Bardasano Rubio & Arano Bermejo, 1980b); and studies of the sociological and anthropological aspects of psychic surgery (Jiménez Visado, 1984). Moreover, other members of the Society have: speculated on the pineal gland as a possible somatic organ for ESP reception (Bardasano Rubio et al., 1981); examined neurophysiology and its importance for parapsychological research (Jiménez Visado, 1985); considered the psychophysiological correlates of hypnosis and its implications for parapsychology (González Ordi, 1985); investigated perception of the laying-on of hands by a sensorially isolated subject (Prat et al., 1988); proposed three-dimensional models of RSPK studies, that is, the cases are studied within a parapsychological, psychological, and psychosociological context (De Castro, González Ordi, & Berrocal Muela, 1984); and offered theoretical models to explain firewalking (Perera, 1989).

In the educational area, even though efforts have been made to include parapsychology in the curriculum of universities in Spain,

<sup>3</sup> Jordán Peña published a book called *Casas Encantadas, Poltergeists* [Haunted Houses, Poltergeists] (1982), in which he presented an overview of cases and theories of hauntings. For a review of this book, see Alvarado (1985).

<sup>5</sup> The languages were English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese.

<sup>4</sup> A group that conducts experimental and theoretical research about ESP.

these have not been successful as yet. Since its inception, however, members of the Society have been very active in organizing numerous educational activities and seminars at different universities. The seminar offered by the president of the Society, Ramos Perera Molina, at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in 1975 drew distinguished and prominent figures such as Prince Juan Carlos of Spain and his wife and the minister of education.

Since 1975, the Society has also published a biannual journal, entitled *Psi Comunicación*, which includes English abstracts. The journal covers both the activities of the Society and a wide range of topics in parapsychology, some of which have been mentioned. In addition, their journal includes a section for national and international news on parapsychological activities around the world. Members of the Society have published several books summarizing its research activities. I have already mentioned the books by Fernández Briones (1983). Other books include an anthology, entitled *La Nueva Parapsicología: Introducción a la Parapsicología Científica* [The New Parapsychology: An Introduction to Scientific Parapsychology] edited by Fernández Briones (1981a), a valuable introduction to the field, and Mario Capel's *La Supervivencia Después de la Muerte: Evidencia Espontánea y Experimental* [Survival after Death: Spontaneous and Experimental Evidence] (1981) reviewing some of the research and phenomena related to the issue of survival after death.

Although parapsychology has been negligible in Spain until recent times, it is important to point out that we are now witnessing a boom in parapsychological activities in that country. Unfortunately, even though the Society seems to be the best organized, and to have the most resources in the Ibero-American world, its members have not participated in the broader international parapsychological conferences, such as that of the Parapsychological Association, possibly because of the language barrier. In addition, it is unfortunate and disheartening to find that such a large, productive, and well-organized society has no member in the PA.

#### Brazil

At the 1990 Parapsychological Association convention, David Hess, who has made several field trips to study Brazilian parapsychology, presented a paper in which he described Brazilian parapsychology in the following terms:

Brazil does not have a coherent community of academic parapsychologists, and there are few if any people in Brazil who research and publish

at the standards of the Parapsychological Association. Instead, what is called "parapsychology" in Brazil is largely defined by rival groups of Catholic and Spiritist (Kardecist) intellectuals. (Hess, 1990)

To understand parapsychology in Brazil, we need to be familiar with the cultural milieu from which it has evolved, one that is dominated by Afro-Brazilian cults and Catholicism. On the one hand, we have the Spiritist tradition that came from France through the teachings of Allan Kardec; Spiritists believe that spiritual progress is effected by a series of compulsory reincarnations. They believe that mediumship provides opportunities to communicate with deceased individuals. Moreover, Spiritism is strongly influenced in Brazil by the Afro-Brazilian cults such as Umbanda and Candomblé derived from the African religions brought to Brazil through the slave trade (Bastide, 1971; Gieser, 1985).

This spectrum of Spiritist beliefs and Afro-Brazilian religions has crept in and mixed in Brazilian society (Hess, 1987), creating a variety of belief systems from which Brazilian brands of parapsychology have evolved. There are many interesting combinations of the Kardecist type of Spiritism and all sorts of Brazilian religious movements that essentially accept possession, the influence of spirits of deceased individuals as well as the belief that divinities can possess individuals and can effect healing (Parra Alvarez, 1981).

On the other hand, there is the Catholic tradition that has developed a system that uses parapsychology as an ideology with which to fight and eventually destroy all the movements the church sees as superstition and threats to the established Catholic dogmas (Hess, 1990). This system has been developed mainly through the work of one of the most influential and respected "parapsychologists" in Ibero-America, Father Oscar González Quevedo, a Spanish-born Jesuit priest living in Brazil. Padre Quevedo (as he is known) and Luis Ferreira da Silva cofounded the Latin American Center of Parapsychology, CLAP, of the Anchieta College of São Paulo in 1970.

The Center, which was closed down in 1982 and reopened in 1989 under reduced circumstances, used to offer clinical counseling for people suffering from psychological problems related to religious experiences and practices (e.g., demonic possession). The Center still has an impressive library<sup>6</sup> of books on parapsychology, which used to be housed in huge facilities that also accommodated an experimental and clinical laboratory and a museum of objects

<sup>6</sup> One of the biggest parapsychology libraries in Latin America with approximately 4,000 volumes.